



SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

22 JUN 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR THE USAFA BOARD OF VISITORS

SUBJECT: Reports Concerning Religious Climate at the USAF Academy

Last month I directed a Headquarters Review Group, led by Lieutenant General Roger Brady (AF/DP), to assess the religious climate at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). In addition, I requested and received an independent review of this issue by the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF). Finally, I directed our Inspector General to conduct a Complaint Analysis of a complaint against the Academy's Commandant regarding specific instances of religious expression. This memorandum forwards you the reports of the two climate assessments, provides a status update on the Inspector General's work, and outlines my plan of action.

General Brady's cross-functional Review Group completed a comprehensive assessment and found an Academy earnestly engaged in dealing with an issue that has been the subject of debate throughout our Nation's history. General Brady found the overall problem was not one of institutional or widespread religious discrimination, but of failure to fully accommodate all members' needs and a lack of awareness of the boundary between permissible and inappropriate expression of religious beliefs in a military setting. In sum, the Academy's Superintendent responded to some well-publicized events early in his tenure, conducted anonymous surveys, found some legitimate concerns, and initiated a concerted effort to emphasize the importance of religious respect in the Academy's character development program.

Approximately two years ago, Secretary of the Air Force James Roche and Air Force Chief of Staff General John Jumper embarked on an Agenda for Change for our Academy that has served us well. The Agenda placed new focus at the Academy on its core mission of officership development based on our Air Force Core Values. Under the excellent leadership of the Superintendent, Lieutenant General John Rosa, the Agenda put us on a course for deliberate improvement. That course allowed General Rosa to better identify issues of religious respect and accommodation, work the issues openly and forthrightly, and put well thought out solutions in place.

In that vein, General Brady's report is on target and keeps us on the Agenda's course. His conclusions can be summarized under three general categories: 1) the challenge of developing future officers from a pool of 4000 bright young people who join the Academy from the broader American society; 2) Academy practices that reflected a lack of awareness of the needs of Airmen of minority faith groups; and 3) behavior of some faculty and staff who expressed their religious beliefs from positions of authority. Detailed in the final report are nine findings regarding the overall climate and nine recommendations for action. I have accepted General Brady's recommendations and will personally track their progress. The NCMAF's assessment is consistent with General Brady's conclusions and I support the NCMAF's recommendations as well.

First, to address the challenges inherent in values-based development of 18-22 year-olds, General Rosa's campaign plan to attack this issue is a significant first step. But more is needed, so the training--"Respecting the Spiritual Values of all People (RSVP)"--will continue in successive phases over the next academic year. Beyond that, the Review Group report recommends a portion of the Academy's character development program be devoted to teaching increased awareness of and respect for diverse cultures and beliefs and be integrated throughout the academic, military and athletic curricula. Further, we're seeking experts from inside and outside of the Federal government to help us in further developing this program.

Second, to address the issue of Academy practices that produced, at a minimum, the perception of insensitivity toward those of minority faith groups, General Rosa has already acted to remove or correct some of the practices that caused these perceptions to arise. General Brady found that a combination of immature behavior by peers and barriers to reasonable accommodation had made some adherents to minority beliefs feel ignored by the institution. General Brady recommends the Academy make further accommodation for certain religious observances, in a reasonable manner consistent with the mission, such as more flexible scheduling of cadet training and consideration of special dietary needs. In addition, I am directing my Director of our Review Boards Agency to visit the Academy to confirm corrections made in the Academy's complaint mechanisms. Specifically, he is to ensure Military Equal Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity processes, and employee access to them, are in good working order to support the Superintendent's needs.

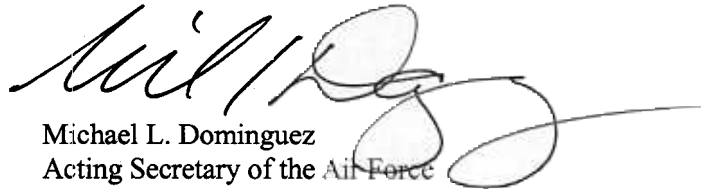
Third, with regard to faculty and staff behavior, General Rosa has held his subordinates accountable and has directly addressed instances of inappropriate behavior. The Review Group found some well-intentioned faculty and staff, as role models in superior positions, needing greater guidance regarding permissible and inappropriate forms of religious expression. Thus, General Brady recommends the development of operational guidance for commanders to assist in exercising their command discretion in this area. General Jumper has already transmitted direction to all Air Force commanders instructing them to be sensitive to issues of religious respect. He will soon transmit more detailed guidance and hold his subordinate commanders responsible for creating the conditions for religious respect in their command. In addition, at the Academy, in furtherance of the Agenda for Change and in order to bind our Academy more closely to the operational experiences of an expeditionary Air Force, we have modified our faculty and staff assignment processes to limit tours of duty. Finally, the Complaint Analysis I directed concerning the Commandant and religious expression dismissed six of the seven elements of the complaint, and recommends the seventh be explored in greater detail. That exploration is ongoing.

Institutionalizing real change in the development of our future leaders requires that we stay the course. We determined several months ago that persevering in this important endeavor requires General Rosa to have the resources of another skilled leader on his staff. After careful consideration of this matter, I am also announcing today the selection of Major General (select) Irv Halter as the Academy's Vice Superintendent. The Vice Superintendent position is a new position that will help General Rosa address strategic issues and the Academy's many external stakeholders, while also devoting the requisite attention to driving the Agenda for Change and our other transformational initiatives into the Academy programs.

Our Academy's mission is to develop leaders of character for service to the Air Force and the Nation. This mission of leader development calls for us to continually examine whether we are delivering what is necessary to accomplish the mission America has given us. Sometimes we identify certain things we don't like. When this occurs, we investigate, fix it, and advance. The Academy's leadership found this problem, and they are fixing it. The fixes require work that will continue, and Air Force leadership is engaged and helping.

General Brady aptly notes the importance to many Airmen of a spiritual grounding as a foundation for the values we seek in leaders, as well as the need for leader development to include robust discussions of weighty issues of faith, ethical values, and religion. Of equal importance, lack of respect for another's right to his or her individual religious beliefs, or freedom to hold no belief, is abhorrent to what we are as a professional fighting force. Moreover, the global fight against terrorism in which America is currently engaged has no room for attitudes and behaviors that reflect a lack of respect for others' belief systems. The solution set is based on our Core Values--Integrity first, Service before self, and Excellence in all we do--which act as the underpinnings for the development of character in our leaders and produce a climate of respect for our fellow Airmen.

Our Academy and our Air Force will be better for having had this experience. Implementing the recommendations in these reports will take us farther along the path set out by the Agenda for Change. We will proceed in a spirit of openness and continue to engage with you. You have been instrumental in the progress we have made so far, and we hope to continue to benefit from your advice. Thank you for your support as we continue to nurture a culture in our Armed Forces founded on enduring values that make us the world's finest military.



Michael L. Dominguez
Acting Secretary of the Air Force

Attachment:
Religious Climate at USAFA Report (including NCMAF Report)